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ABSTRACT

Mary Abigail Dodge, a Washington, D.C., correspondent before and after the United States Civil War, was one of the most acclaimed women journalists of the nineteenth century. Unknown today, Dodge wrote on politics, religion, and contemporary issues for newspapers and magazines and commented prolifically on the role of women in society. After feminist leanings as a young woman, she became increasingly conservative as she grew older. Her most celebrated articles appeared in the "New York Tribune" in 1877 and 1878 and attacked the efforts at civil service reform attempted under the administration of President Rutherford B. Hayes. Throughout her 40-year career, Dodge insisted on writing under the pseudonym, "Gail Hamilton." Dividing her life into two totally different spheres, she remained "Abby" to her family and refused to acknowledge in public that she was also "Gail," the famous literary figure. Well-known as a brilliant and witty conversationalist, she had wide-ranging contacts in literary and political circles. Her career illustrates that an able woman could carve a place for herself in Victorian journalism, but it also illuminates the self-doubts and insecurities of a woman trying to function in a man's occupation. (Author)

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MARY ABIGAIL DODGE: JOURNALIST & ANTI-FEMINIST

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ABSTRACT

MARY ABIGAIL DODGE: JOURNALIST & ANTI-FEMINIST

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This paper analyzes the career of Mary Abigail Dodge, a Washington correspondent before and after the Civil War and one of the most acclaimed woman journalists of the nineteenth century. Unknown today, Dodge wrote on politics, religion and contemporary issues for newspapers and magazines and commented prolifically on the role of women in society. After feminist leanings as a young woman, she became increasingly conservative as she grew older, reflecting the views of a substantial segment of society that applauded her work in popular publications. Her most celebrated articles appeared in the New York Tribune in 1877 and 1878 and attacked efforts at civil service reform under the administration of Rutherford B. Hayes. Their satirical content probably was inspired by her close relationship with James G. Blaine, her first cousin's husband, who had lost the 1876 Republican presidential nomination to Hayes. From the 1870s to the 1890s Dodge lived each winter in the capital with the Blaine family, and she is thought to have helped Blaine with his speeches.

Throughout her 40-year career, which lasted from the 1850s to her death in 1896, Dodge insisted on writing under a pseudonym, "Gail Hamilton" (taken from her middle name and the name of her hometown). Dividing her life into two totally different spheres, she remained "Abby," dutiful daughter of a farmer in Essex County, Massachusetts, to her family and refused to acknowledge in public that she was "Gail," the famous "literary lady." Her shyness stemmed partly from concern over her appearance, marred by the loss of one eye in a childhood accident. Perhaps to compensate she acquired an extensive wardrobe. Well-known as a brilliant and witty conservationalist, she had wide-ranging contacts in literary and political circles.

Her success illustrated that an able woman could carve a place for herself in Victorian journalism, but her career illuminated the self-doubts and insecurities of a woman trying to function in a man's occupation.

Mary Abigail Dodge:
Journalist & Anti-Feminist

Unknown today, a New England woman, Mary Abigail Dodge, was a Washington correspondent before and after the Civil War and one of the most acclaimed woman journalists of the nineteenth century. Known for her trenchant wit, she covered politics, religion and contemporary issues for newspapers and magazines and wrote prolifically on the role of women. Out of step with the mainstream of feminist thought in her own day, Dodge reflected the conservative views of a substantial segment of society that applauded her work in popular publications. Her 40-year career, which lasted from the 1850s to her death in 1896, illustrated that an able woman could carve a place for herself in Victorian journalism, but it also illuminated the self-doubts and insecurities of a woman trying to function in a man's occupation.

Born in the Essex County village of Hamilton, Massachusetts, on March 31, 1833, Dodge used the pseudonym, "Gail Hamilton," (taken from her middle name and the name of her hometown) for her entire career. She wrote for at least four newspapers: The National Era, a Washington abolitionist publication; The Congregationalist and The Independent, widely-known religious newspapers that covered general news and were published in Boston and New York respectively, and The New York Tribune. Her essays, often humorous accounts of the war between the sexes, appeared in the Atlantic Monthly, Galaxy, North American Review, Cosmopolitan and the Arena. Collected in eight books between 1862 and 1868, they established her as a star in the firmament of Ticknor and

Fields, the Boston firm that also published Whittier, Longfellow, Mrs. Stowe and Hawthorne. After Dodge argued with Fields over royalties in 1868, she changed publishers and produced a sarcastic account of the royalty battle. Other works included a novel, seven additional collections of essays, occasional poetry, a biography of James G. Blaine, the political figure, with whose family she spent winters in Washington for 25 years, and a final book attempting to prove life after death.[1]

Her essays provided a witty, feminine interpretation of self-reliance and individual improvement based on the philosophy of Emerson, whom she knew personally.[2] She advocated enlarged educational opportunities for women and initially backed suffrage. Later she opposed it on grounds it would lower women to the level of men whereas Dodge was convinced women should occupy a higher spiritual plane exercising indirect influence on public affairs. A critic of marriage, she believed the institution could be purified if men were less tyrannical and more attuned to women's feelings. In later years she turned to religious subjects, attempting to reconcile Congregationalism with scientific interpretations of the Bible. She also wrote stories for children and was nominal co-editor of two magazines, Our Young Folks (1865-67) and Wood's Household Magazine (1872-73), leaving most of the work to others.

Although numerous Victorian authors used pseudonyms, few went to the lengths she did to hide from the public. Dodge detested being introduced as "Gail Hamilton," refused all

interviews and requests for biographical information and declined opportunities to speak. She explained the rationale for her pseudonym in a letter rejecting a request for her autograph: "A public name is not a mere caprice. It is given for the sole purpose of a lightning conductor--to catch all the flash and crash of the outside electricity, and leave the inner home of privacy unharmed, untouched."[3]

This division of personal and professional identities is revealed in writing she never expected the public to see--notebooks kept as a schoolgirl in Ipswich, Massachusetts, a memorial to her mother, and voluminous correspondence. These personal papers show she clung to family ties and played a woman's traditional role in her "inner home of privacy," while in her career she performed like a man. They picture her compensating for the lack of a husband and children by devoted relationships with her mother and Blaine, whose wife, Harriet Stanwood Blaine, was her first cousin. After the author's death, many of her letters were published by her sister, Augusta, in two volumes titled Gail Hamilton's Life in Letters (1901).

Dodge's views on marriage, womanhood and a career were shaped by her childhood in Hamilton, where she was the product of a Congregational upbringing and conventional family life. She was the youngest of seven children born to James Brown Dodge, a well-to-do farmer, and Hannah Stanwood Dodge, a schoolteacher before marriage.[4] In the Memorial to Mrs. Hannah Stanwood Dodge, compiled with Augusta and intended only for the family, Mary Abigail Dodge stressed the difficulties of her mother's life.

Care of the seven children and lack of domestic help overtaxed her mother mentally and physically, Dodge wrote: "She has told me many a time that she never knew what it was to be tired before she was married."[5] Calling her mother the major influence in her life, Dodge theorized "that the mother transmits to her child not so much the tastes which she gratifies as those which she represses. I think that was why Augusta and I always liked books and hated housework; liked leisure and independence, and hated drudgery with a mortal hatred."[6]

After displaying precocious ability at the village school in Hamilton, she was sent at twelve to a boarding school in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and the following year to the Ipswich (Massachusetts) Female Seminary. At Ipswich, where she was graduated in 1850 and remained as a teacher until 1854, she received an unusually thorough education for the day.[7] In her Ipswich notebooks she worried about her appearance, marred by the accidental loss of the sight of her left eye at the age of two when a fork was stabbed into it. Under the title "Bashfulness and Ugliness," she wrote: "The fact that I was ugly, surpassingly ugly, ugly in form--ugly in feature, has been ineffaceably impressed upon my mind."[8] According to her friend, Harriet P. Spofford, another author, Dodge "never in all her life could bear to be looked at."[9] Another paragraph from her "Commonplace Book" pinpointed the root of her shyness:

> When you are in company with a dozen ladies, strangers to you perhaps, who are flippantly discussing Mary Langford's party, and the merits of Mrs. Smith's girl, and the extravagance of Mrs. Jones, pray

> tell me what does mental beauty avail you? It may cause you to be happier and more useful at home--to be more loved and respected by your intimate friends, but in society, it will never cover your homely face. . . .[10]

Dodge contemplated woman's role in another schoolgirl essay: "I have no sympathy with those radical reformers who would overturn the very foundations of society--who would thrust woman from her retirement and place her upon the contested arena of public life. . . .By the domestic hearth, veiled from the eye of the world let her be found."[11] Why then did she not marry? Spofford, who raved over Dodge's "exquisite complexion," and "golden-brown hair," called her "very attractive," and insisted, "if you had not thought her so at first, you were sure of it when you left her presence . . . ."[12] Spofford said she had "various and persistent offers of marriage" but gave no details.[13] Dodge's obituary, however, noted she was "extremely plain" with a large head, "heavy" features and "an ugly cast" to her eyes but added "one forgot her plainness after the first few minutes of conversation."[14]

Dodge was caught in a paradox. She rejected the totally domestic role--possibly because she believed her appearance would not attract a husband who could keep her from the toil experienced by her mother. Yet she accepted the cultural mystique that a woman's highest place lay in the province of her own mother, the home. Her inability to resolve this conflict created the split in public and private identities. "Gail Hamilton" competed in the world; "Abby" (as her friends called her)

remained tied to the family circle. Symbolically, the only work printed under her own name was the Memorial never intended for public consumption.

Dodge began writing while teaching school. Tiring of Ipswich, she moved to Hartford, Connecticut, in 1854, first teaching Latin and mathematics at the Female Seminary and then Latin and English at the Hartford High School. Dissatisfied with low pay and long hours, in 1856 she sent poetry and essays to Dr. Gamaliel Bailey, editor of the National Era, Washington's abolitionist newspaper. Bailey was sympathetic to women writers and had been the first publisher of Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin, run as a serial in the Era. Also he had hired as assistant editor, Sara Jane Clarke (later Lippincott), who wrote "Grace Greenwood" and was one of the first women Washington correspondents. "Gail Hamilton" gave only a post office box number and refused to tell Bailey her real name until he praised her work and pleaded with her to identify herself.[15] Equally mysterious with J.H. Ladd, editor of the New York Independent, she prompted him to remonstrate, "my dear Mrs. Gail, or Girl, we don't pay 'nobodies', we don't . . . ."[16] When Bailey and his family insisted on meeting her in Hartford, ". . . I dragged myself down, could not speak a word, stammered, blushed, almost cried and acted the dunce generally," she wrote her mother.[17]

Career aspirations led her to move to Washington in 1858 as governess for the six Bailey children, although she "suffered agonies" at the prospect of Washington society, according to Spofford.[18] Initially afraid to leave her room, eventually she conquered her shyness. As she reported to her family in Hamilton, she learned to hold her own with abolitionist celebrities in the Bailey drawing room helped by the acquisition of a new "green silk, low neck and short sleeves, lace cape and rose-colored bow."[19] Throughout the rest of her life she dressed elaborately for social gatherings.[20]

Writing at night she penned a nine-part series for the National Era in 1859 titled "Men and Women." Reprinted in her first book, Country Living and Country Thinking, (1862) "Men and Women" initially argued for women's equality, then for submission. She began by acknowledging sexual cultural barriers: "I am a woman . . . . I am sorry that it is so . . . . Commonplace as is the life of John Smith, the life of Mrs. J.S. is still more so."[21] She sympathized with the suffrage cause but urged women to improve themselves instead of depending on the ballot.[22] Warning against marriage for material gain, she declared "a home purchased by the sale of yourself is a dear bargain . . . ."[23] Yet she advised women to marry if swept into love, while she recommended that those not carried away develop their God-given talents. Instead of aiming for equality, women should prove their moral superiority to men, she concluded. In an age when men accumulated fortunes at the expense of fellow men, she argued the common conviction that women possessed finer sensibilities.[24]

Since the Era had a wide circulation among influential abolitionists, the series attracted wide attention.[25]

While with the Baileys she became one of the first women Washington correspondents, employing an additional disguise to move into the masculine preserve of political reporting. As "Cunctare" (which means "hesitate" or possibly "dodge" in Latin), she sent columns of political news to C.A. Richardson, editor of the Congregationalist. "Gail Hamilton" wrote for the Congregationalist on such topics as church attendance, but "Cunctare" took readers to the floor of Congress. Richardson wanted to sign her political dispatches "Gail Hamilton" too, but Dodge wrote her family, "I wish very much that it should not be, and I don't think I shall have it."[26] Evidently she feared it would be far more embarrassing to be discovered as a political commentator than a "literary lady."

Dodge was the third woman Washington correspondent to cover politics. The first, Jane G. Swisshelm, an abolitionist editor from Pittsburgh who wrote for Horace Greely's Tribune, marched into the Senate press gallery in 1850 and demanded equal rights with men journalists to sit there.[27] The second was "Grace Greenwood" (Sara Jane Clarke Lippincott) who before her marriage had lived at the Bailey home, like Dodge, and corresponded for the Saturday Evening Post of Philadelphia while working on the Era from 1850 to 1852.[28]

The two had become acquainted through letters even before Dodge moved to Washington when "Gail Hamilton" submitted stories to a children's magazine run by Lippincott and her husband, Leander. As a correspondent, Dodge patterned her newsgathering after Lippincott rather than Swisshelm. Both "Grace" and "Gail" discreetly obtained material from visitors to the Bailey home and their own observations from the ladies' galleries of Congress. The two became lifelong friends, although Lippincott, unlike Dodge, made no attempt to hide her real name, gave lectures and supported suffrage.

"Cunctare's" columns consisted of witty political analysis. Nine columns appeared in the winter of 1858-59, dealing mainly with abolition, decorum in Congress and economy in government. Her tongue-in-cheek approach is marked in this comment on Stephen A. Douglas following the Lincoln-Douglas debates: "Unlike the prophet's cloud, from overspreading the whole sky, he has dwindled down to the size of a man's hand."[29] From December, 1859, to April, 1860, "Cunctare" highlighted the frenetic pre-Civil War atmosphere in 18 columns. "Slavery and Freedom are grappling in a close, fierce and hostile embrace," she wrote following John Brown's attack on Harper's Ferry.[30] Her humor enlivened accounts of tedious debates: "Honest men 'appeal to the people' and are desirous of nothing more than that their speeches should 'go to the country'--a consumation devoutly to be wished, if country air could have the same bracing and invigorating effect on feeble speeches that it does on feeble folks."[31]

After Congress adjourned, Dodge left Washington, heeding her ailing mother's fears for her safety as the capital prepared for war.[32] Finances also entered into her decision. Following Bailey's death in 1859, the Era had folded and Mrs. Bailey was unable to pay Dodge who had been forced to live on her Congregationalist earnings.[33] The opportunity to return to Hamilton and write books, which might be financial successes, appealed to Dodge, particularly since her father had semi-retired from farming and her mother had a hired girl.[34]

While it is difficult to measure Dodge's impact as a pre-Civil War correspondent, "Gail Hamilton's" success on the Era probably encouraged other women to seek careers in Washington journalism. At least three women followed Dodge as Washington correspondents during the Civil War and during the 1870's more than a dozen were listed in the Congressional Directory as entitled to Congressional Press Gallery privileges.[35] "Gail Hamilton" obviously was a woman and thus served as a role model for other women, even though the sex of "Cunctare" was more carefully concealed.

For 1860 to 1870, Dodge remained in Hamilton, dutifully caring for her mother who died in 1868 (four years after her father), and churning out eight books of light essays, many reprinted versions of magazine articles on the so-called "woman question." Although she loved the country, she occasionally longed for more stimulation. Thanking a friend for sending her newspapers, she wrote, "I am much embarrassed by the want of a

good library. I am eight miles away from everything in the shape of one."[36] Shortly before her mother's death, she declined an invitation to visit the capital: "Certainly I cannot go to Washington much as I should like it and much as I thank you for wanting me to! But here is my baby whom I can neither take nor leave."[37]

Her magazine articles, amusing accounts of ordinary life filled with practical moralizing and commentary on current events, often contained dialogues between herself and fictitious males. In these imaginary battles of the sexes, she aired her opinions on woman's role. Linking a decision for a career to a woman's personal appearance, Dodge wrote in "Gala Days" (an Atlantic Monthly piece reprinted in a collection under that title in 1863): "Now I maintain a woman ought to be very handsome . . . or else she ought to go to work and do something."[38] While beauty in itself fulfilled a woman, she maintained, those not endowed needed to develop themselves: . . ."a clever woman, whether she be a painter or a teacher or a dress-maker--if she really has an object in life, a career, she is safe. She is a power. She commands a realm. She owns a world."[39] "Safe" from what? Undoubtedly the tyranny of men. As she put it, "Men are childish and as I have said before, animal. I don't think they have nearly the self-restraint, self-denial, high dignity and purity and conscience that women have--take them in the mass."[40]

In her own career, Dodge saw herself performing like a man. In an Atlantic article titled "My Garden" and reprinted

in Country Living and Country Thinking, she wrote, "There is about my serious style a vigor of thought, a comprehensiveness of view, a closeness of logic, and a terseness of diction commonly supposed to pertain only to the stronger sex. Not wanting is a certain fanciful sprightliness which is the peculiar grace of woman . . ."[41] One contemporary critic praised her "readable" style and found it "tart, tender, shrewish, pathetic, monitory, objurgatory, tolerant, prejudiced, didactic, and dramatic by turns."[42] Another agreed somewhat with her own evaluation: "Her championship of her sex and its cause has been aggressive, defiant, one might add blustering if she were a man."[43]

While in Hamilton she wrote two of three volumes she said were designed to improve the marriage relationship. In the first, A New Atmosphere (1865), she warned girls "your fathers will traffic in you without scruple" by forcing wedlock.[44] She blamed marriage for keeping women subservient: "Men think if women strike out in a career of their own, the matter of securing and disposing of a wife may not be quite the easy thing it is at present."[45] Yet she upheld the "sacred" institution of marriage, simply urging men to permit their wives and daughters to cultivate their talents.

In Women's Wrongs (1868), she attacked Dr. John Todd, a minister opposed to women's demands for independence. Although convinced suffrage was inevitable, Dodge argued it would not help women combat economic discrimination. Instead she proposed a novel alternative: Rather than extend the ballot to all women,

limit it to "intelligent and virtuous" individuals of both sexes.[46] At this time she was considered sufficiently friendly to suffrage to be asked by Susan B. Anthony to contribute to the radical suffrage newspaper, the Revolution, but there is no record she did so.[47]

As the 1870's unfolded, Dodge grew more conservative, influenced by her relationship with the family of James G. Blaine of Maine, (Speaker of the House, 1869-75; Senator, 1876-81; Republican nominee for President, 1884, and Secretary of State, 1880-81 and 1888-92). In 1870 she returned to Washington to live with the Blaines, establishing a pattern for the rest of her life of winters as the Blaines' guest in the capital and summers at her home in Hamilton. Helping her cousin, Mrs. Blaine, entertain and care for her seven children, Dodge became a family fixture. She took the major trip of her life with the Blaines and their friend, steel magnet Andrew Carnegie, accompanying them to Europe in 1887-88. Earlier she had visited the American West and South.

As she continued her career, her ideas solidified in favor of the status quo, and she took a strong stand against suffrage. " . . . I am coming round by degrees to woman suffrage and shall go against it hammer and tongs," she informed an editor.[48] In Woman's Worth and Worthlessness (1872), the last of her books on marriage, Dodge contended domestic life would be disrupted if both husband and wife were involved in political activity and women lost their spiritual superiority. The ballot would

make women "aggressive, pugnacious, self-centered," she argued, and remove their opportunity to indirectly influence men for good. Perhaps unconsciously, Dodge was inspired by the Blaines' example of domestic bliss. Although accused of using public position for private gain, Blaine led an exemplary family life and his wife presented a picture of a contented mother, whose opinions were cherished by her husband.

In Washington Dodge resumed newspaper correspondence, becoming one of a group of noteworthy women journalists in the capital during the 1870's. Among other outstanding figures were her old friend, "Grace Greenwood" (Sara J. Clarke Lippincott) of the New York Times, Mary Clemmer Ames of the New York Independent and "Olivia" (Emily Edson Briggs) of the Philadelphia Press, all of whom commented on political affairs from a feminine perspective. Others such as Austine Sneed of the New York Graphic primarily wrote social news which Dodge deplored: "I do hate that whole style of writing. . . . It is meddlesome and mischievous."[50] Dodge wrote for The New York Tribune in 1877 and 1878, blistering the administration of Rutherford B. Hayes under the guise of ridiculing its civil service reform efforts.

By attacking Hayes she demonstrated loyalty to Blaine, who had lost the 1876 Presidential nomination to him. Dodge adored Blaine, whose hospitality gave her entry into the highest Washington society. She wrote him kittenish letters, calling him the "third man in the Nation" and herself "only

a woman."[51] To her sister, Augusta, in Hamilton, she praised Blaine as a "conquering hero" for his triumphs of parliamentary maneuvering.[52] In her eyes, Blaine, a spokesman for business who had acquired a fortune by unexplained means, could do no wrong.[53] When Lippincott and Ames, among other women correspondents, deplored the extravagances of Gilded Age society, Dodge played down the expense of circles in which the Blaines (and she) moved. In an article for the Galaxy, a popular magazine, "Gail Hamilton" assured readers that Washington social life rested "on a purely intellectual basis," and not, as had been widely reported, on wasteful display.[54]

Dodge delivered her chief blasts against Hayes in a 50-part series of Tribune articles. Unlike Lippincott and Ames who crusaded for higher morals in politics, Dodge defended the scandal-ridden Grant administration and the spoils system. She ridiculed civil service reformers, portraying them and Hayes as pretentious hypocrites, and tore into one of Blaine's chief enemies, Carl Schurz, Hayes' Secretary of the Interior. The Tribune, which supported Blaine although it favored partial civil service reform, served as a logical vehicle for the series, and it was rumored that Blaine either had written or instigated these pieces. Indignantly denying these charges editorially, The Tribune lavished applause on the articles as the "most brilliant and the most widely read series of criticism ever contributed by a woman's pen to the literature of American politics."[55]

Today, when efforts are underway to allow civil servants more participation in politics, her arguments hold some contemporary relevance. She contended it was unfair to forbid political activity: "Does the office-holder cease to be a citizen? Has he no duties to perform in the way of selecting good men and rejecting bad men?"[56] Honor cannot be legislated, Dodge argued, and no system on earth ever can be set up to guarantee an absence of corruption. Since human nature is imperfect, "Let us face the fact that men are inevitably and honorably—at least not dishonorably--selfish, and enlist their selfishness in the cause of good government."[57] For the most part, however, Dodge sidestepped the main argument: Whether it is preferable to have government employees selected by merit or politics. Instead she focused on Hayes' alleged capricious appointments, possible abuse of competitive examinations, and a defense of nepotism: "(Shall) the public service be closed to everyone whose family, near or remote, shall contain a man who has been chosen by his friends and neighbors to represent them in the National Congress?"[58]

Many articles "roasted" various reformers and reform publications, particularly The Nation, The Springfield (Mass.) Republican, The Chicago Tribune, and The Advertiser and The Journal of Boston, for inconsistencies and disagreements among themselves. For example, she attacked The Nation for a falling-out with a reform Congressman, asserting no sooner did he "deliver an opinion opposed to that of The Nation than that

journal. . .sat up on its hind legs and howled. . . .If it is not corruption it is narrow-mindedness that flies into a fury when arguments fail. . . ."[59] Dodge was guilty of the same fault. It is hard to see how divergent opinions between a Congressman and The Nation in themselves proved the failure of civil service reform. The series bogged down in petty sarcasm and absurd comparisons between corruption in Sunday Schools and government.[60]

Yet the articles enhanced Dodge's reputation. By the 1880's her magazine articles, increasingly on religious themes, drew so great a following that she could dictate to editors: "Two hundred dollars an article, without limit as to length. Free range as to themes over this world and the next."[61] After two of the Blaine children died while Blaine was secretary of state under Benjamin Harrison, Dodge began a series of Sunday talks on the Bible in the Blaine mansion that attracted cabinet members, diplomats and Congressmen (published in A Washington Bible Class, 1891).[62]

Her last journalistic ventures were curious throwbacks to her early interest in women's issues. In articles and letters to editors, she championed Florence Chandler Maybrick, an American woman whom Dodge maintained had been unjustly sentenced to life imprisonment in England for the alleged poisoning of her husband. Dodge printed a 41-page pamphlet on the case, "An Object Lesson in Woman's Rights" (1892), and argued Maybrick was the victim of sexual discrimination.[63]

She also enlisted Mrs. Benjamin Harrison to petition the British government for Maybrick's release (which occurred after Dodge's death).[64]

It was widely believed that Dodge aided Blaine with his speeches, and a fact that she helped prepare his two-volume series, Twenty Years of Congress (1884-86).[65] Clearly Blaine respected her judgment and as his confidant she exercised at least some of the behind-the-scenes political influence she had recommended for women as preferable to voting. Blaine bequeathed to her his private letters and papers which she used in the eulogistic Biography of James G. Blaine (1895). Mrs. Blaine expressed great affection for her; still her description of "Cousin Abby" in a letter to her daughter hinted of condescension: ". . .she ("Abby") stood arrayed (at a railroad station) in a brown dress, a red shawl and a gray hat, her strapped bundle, her bag and her knitting basket in her hand, the embodiment of genius and the very picture of a strongminded woman. . ."[66]

Obviously Dodge needed the emotional support of family life which she found in the Blaine household. In her mid-40s she proposed marriage to an old friend, John Greenleaf Whittier, the bachelor poet who lived in Amesbury, Massachusetts. Although the two had carried on a flirtatious correspondence for years, Whittier quickly turned down the suggestion. According to Whittier's biographer, Albert Mordell, Whittier "feared to go to her (remodeled) house (in Hamilton) because she told him she had specifically built it for both of them. She was at

first angry when he diplomatically rejected her, but in her cooler moments she realized that he had made her no promises.[67]

Dodge suffered a paralytic stroke at the Blaine mansion in Washington in 1895 while finishing the Blaine biography. Taken home to Hamilton, she recovered sufficiently to dictate an account of visions during her attack that convinced her of immortality (X-Rays, 1896). She died at the age of 63 on Aug. 17, 1896, at her home in Hamilton.

Her obituaries identified her as "Gail Hamilton," praised her "Brilliance" as a writer and conversationalist, and lauded her as the "intellectual magnet of the Blaine household."[68] The Woman's Journal, moderate voice of the suffrage movement, thanked her for early service to suffrage and concluded her career was "an object lesson in woman's capacity as a political thinker and writer."[70] It lamented that a woman who "exercised so strong an influence on American politics should never have been allowed to vote."[71] Today it seems even more of an anomaly that she decided she did not want to, but she must be judged by the context of her times which saw her as a "progressive" voice for women.[72]

It was unfortunate for her development as a journalist that she tied herself so closely to Blaine, becoming an apologist for his questionable political morality.

Her articles for The Tribune, primarily a defense of Blaine's position, lacked the sparkle and freshness of her Congregationalist correspondence. Emotionally unable to exercise objectivity in her Tribune articles, she functioned like a traditional woman dominated by a strong male influence instead of an independent observer. Her impact on other woman journalists lay far less in what she wrote than in the fact she wrote at all. Although she was never able to publicly integrate her two roles, "Abby" and "Gail Hamilton," still her life demonstrated that a woman could be a Washington correspondent in the nineteenth century even if she subscribed to Victorian ideas of womanhood.

Footnotes

[1]See handwritten list of works, Mary Abigail Dodge papers, Essex Institute, Salem, Mass. "Gail Hamilton" published the following books: Country Living & Country Thinking (1862); Gala Days (1863), Stumbling Blocks (1864); A New Atmosphere (1865); Skirmishes and Sketches (1865); Summer Rest (1866); Wool Gathering (1868); Woman's Wrongs: A Counter-Irritant (1868); A Battle of the Books (1870); Women's Worth and Worthlessness (1872); Twelve Miles from a Lemon (1874); Nursery Noonings (1875); Sermons to the Clergy (1876); First Love Is Best (1877); What Think Ye of Christ (1877); Our Common School System (1880); Divine Guidance: Memorial of Allen W. Dodge (1881); The Insuppressible Book (1885); A Washington Bible Class (1891); X-Rays (1896), plus works for juveniles.

[2]Janice Goldsmith Pulsifer, "Gail Hamilton: 1833-1896," Essex Institute Historical Collections, 104 (July 1968), p. 180.

[3]H. Augusta Dodge, ed., Gail Hamilton's Life in Letters II (Boston: Lee & Shepard, 1901), p. 889, hereafter called Letters. Letter to unidentified admirer, Feb. 22, 1887.

[4]Both Dodge (1788-1864) and his wife (1793-1868) came from families of English origin who had lived in Essex County for two hundred years.

[5]Mary Abigail Dodge and H. Augusta Dodge, Memorial to Mrs. Hannah Stanwood Dodge (privately printed, 1869), p. 39. Dodge collection, Essex Institute.

[6]Ibid., 85.

[7]Pulsifer, op. cit., 166. Ipswich Seminary flourished between 1826 and 1876. Mary Lyon, founder of Mount Holyoke College, the first women's college in the United States, taught there in the 1840s. Other graduates were leaders in higher education for women.

[8]Mary Abigail Dodge, "A Chapter on Bashfulness and Ugliness," undated, Commonplace Book, 2, Dodge papers, Essex Institute. There are two notebooks kept between 1841 and 1855.

[9]Harriet P. Spofford, "Gail Hamilton," in A Little Book of Friends (Boston: Little, Brown, 1916), p. 92. Spofford (1835-1921) wrote short stories and novels.

[10]Dodge, "A Chapter on Bashfulness and Ugliness." Commonplace Book, II.

[11]Mary Abigail Dodge, "An Apology for Schoolgirls," Nov. 1, 1850, Commonplace Book, II.

[12]Spofford, op. cit. 92.

[13]Ibid., 93.

[14]The New York Tribune, Aug. 23, 1896.

[15]Letters, 1, 120.

[16]Ibid., 130.

[17]Ibid., 146-47.

[18]Spofford, op. cit. 92.

[19]Letters, 1, 212.

[20]Spofford, op. cit. 100.

[21]National Era, Jan. 6, 1859. A complete file of "Men and Women" is in a scrapbook, Dodge collection, Essex Institute. The scrapbook was kept by George Wood (1799-1870), a close friend of Mary Abigail Dodge, who worked for the Federal government in Washington and wrote fiction.

[22]Ibid., Jan. 20, 1859.

[23]Ibid.

[24]See Barbara J. Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," American Quarterly, 18:151-174 (Summer 1966).

[25]Frank Luther Mott, American Journalism: 1690-1960 (New York: Macmillan, 1962), p. 323. See also Letters, 1, 216.

[26]Letters, 1, 203.

[27]See Maurine H. Beasley, The First Women Washington Correspondents (Washington: George Washington University Studies, No. 4, 1976), 17-27.

[28]Ibid., 41-55.

[29]Congregationalist, Dec. 17, 1858. Complete file of Congregationalist in Boston (Mass.) Public Library.

[30]Ibid., Dec. 16, 1859.

[31]Ibid., Jan. 13, 1860.

[32]Memorial to Mrs. Hannah Stanwood Dodge, 139.

[33]Letters, 1, 271.

[34]Ibid.

[35]Beasley, op. cit., 25. See also Beasley, "Pens and Petticoats," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, George Washington University, Washington, D.C., 1974.

[36]Mary Abigail Dodge to George Wood, Nov. 28, 1862, Dodge papers, Essex Institute.

[37]Mary Abigail Dodge to unidentified friend, possibly her cousin, Harriet Stanwood Blaine, Feb. 5, 1868, Dodge papers, Essex Institute.

[38]Gail Hamilton, "Gala Days," Atlantic Monthly, 12:21-22 (July 1863) reprinted in Gail Hamilton, Gala Days (Boston: Ticknor & Fields, 1863), p. 64.

[39]Ibid.

[40]Ibid., 64-65.

[41]Gail Hamilton, "My Garden," Atlantic Monthly, 9:541 (May 1862) reprinted in Gail Hamilton, Country Living and Country Thinking (Boston: Ticknor & Fields, 1862), 39-40.

[42]Edwin Percy Whipple, American Literature and Other Papers (Boston: Ticknor & Co., 1887), pp. 136-37.

[43]Henry C. Vedder, American Writers of Today (New York: Silver, Burdette & Co., 1894), p. 196.

[44]Gail Hamilton, A New Atmosphere (Boston: Ticknor & Fields, 1865), p.6.

[45]Ibid., 53.

[46]Gail Hamilton, Woman's Wrongs: A Counter-Irritant (Boston: Ticknor & Fields, 1868), p. 169.

[47]Susan B. Anthony to Mary Abigail Dodge, June 4, 1869, Dodge papers, Essex Institute.

[48]Mary Abigail Dodge to William H. Ward, no date, Dodge papers, Essex Institute. Ward was an editor of the New York Independent from 1868 to 1916.

[49]Gail Hamilton, Woman's Worth and Worthlessness (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1872), p. 275.

[50]Letters, 2, 645.

[51]Mary Abigail Dodge to James G. Blaine, March 23, 1869, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

[52]Mary Abigail Dodge to H. Augusta Dodge, Jan. 15, 1876, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

[53]Albert Bushnell Hart, "Review of the Biography of James G. Blaine," American Historical Review, 2 (Oct. 1896), pp. 181-83.

[54]Gail Hamilton, "The Display of Washington Society," Galaxy 21 (June 1876), p. 768.

[55]The New York Tribune, Aug. 25, 1877. See complete file of Dodge's civil service series, Dodge papers, Essex Institute.

[56]"Letter from Gail Hamilton," No. 16, July 26, 1877, file of The New York Tribune series.

[57]"Letter from Gail Hamilton," No. 19, Aug. 11, 1877, file of The New York Tribune series.

[58]"Letter from Gail Hamilton," No. 15, July 20, 1877, file of The New York Tribune series.

[59]"Letter from Gail Hamilton" No. 2, April 12, 1877, file of The New York Tribune series.

[60]"Gail Hamilton-Mr. Clarke," June 22, 1878, file of The New York Tribune series.

[61]Letters, 2, 885.

[62]The New York Tribune, Aug. 18, 1896.

[63]Gail Hamilton, "An Object Lesson in Woman's Rights," 1892, no publisher or place of publication listed, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

[64]Mary Abigail Dodge to Caroline L. Harrison, July 28, 1891, Sophia Smith Collection.

[65]Margaret Wyman Langworthy, "Mary Abigail Dodge," Notable American Women, 1, p. 494.

[66]Harriet S. Blaine Beale, ed., Letters of Mrs. James G. Blaine (New York: Duffield and Co., 1908), 2, p. 19.

[67]Albert Mordell, Quaker Militant: John Greenleaf Whittier (Kennikat Press Inc.: Port Washington, N.Y., 1933), p. 234. Whittier wrote poetry for Dodge including a verse titled "Gail Hamilton's Wedding" but never expected to be taken seriously. Mordell described him as an "invalid" who repressed his sexual urges.

[68]The Dodge home stood between what is now 484 and 514 Bay Road, Hamilton, until the 1930's. There was a legend that it was haunted by Gail Hamilton's ghost. See Pulsifer, op. cit., 194.

[69]The New York Tribune, Aug. 18 and Aug. 23, 1896.

[70]The Woman's Journal, Aug. 22, 1896.

[71]Ibid.

[72]The New York Tribune, Aug. 23, 1896.